

Mother Board

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This Month At NOPC

Adobe Photoshop Elements 6.0

*by
Richard
Vallon*

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So You Have a New Digital Camera

By Robert M. Mayo, Cajun Clickers Computer Club, LA

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If you were lucky enough to get a new camera for Christmas, congratulations! However, along with this jewel, I'm sure you also got a complicated user's manual. I hate 'em! But cheer up; all the mystery will soon go out of that book.

When I bought my first digital camera, I felt lost. I had never worked from menus before, and they seemed so overly complicated. However, after a couple of dozen shots of my refrigerator, washing machine, and the cats, I began to feel comfortable with my new toy. And now, it seems intuitive; I can make changes in the settings without mental effort. In fact, I don't know how I ever got along without the wonderful features this camera has! So the point is: play with it; check out all of the menu options in the privacy of your home so you won't have technical problems later. Following directions in the manual, you're not going to hurt it!

Between photo sessions, it's best not to leave your rechargeable batteries on the charger. Many chargers provide a trickle that's excessive over a period of time, and this will degrade the cells.

In what we laughingly call “the good ol' days,” we had a choice of films to use in our cameras. That was wonderful! There were so many films for color pictures available, as well as the still popular black-and-white shots. And within

This Month at the NOPCC

At our February 6th meeting, Mr. Richard Vallon will give us an overview and demonstration of the recently released Adobe Photoshop Elements 6.0. As with every new version, there are new features in Elements like new Smart Albums. Mr. Vallon will show us these new features and functions and a lot more. For more information, visit Photoshop's homepage:

<http://www.adobe.com/products/photoshopelwin/main.html>

Mr. Vallon has spoken to our group many times before and you'all know he is an very entertaining and informative speaker.

Mark your calendars, create an entry in your PDA, update Outlook (and Express), create a Google map, don't party too much on Mardi Gras and join us on Wednesday, February 6, 2008. The monthly meeting of the NOPC club starts at 6:30pm on the first Wednesday of every month. Location of the meeting is the J.D. Meisler school cafeteria at 3700 Cleary Ave. Metairie. Use the entrance through the breezeway on Pharr Street.

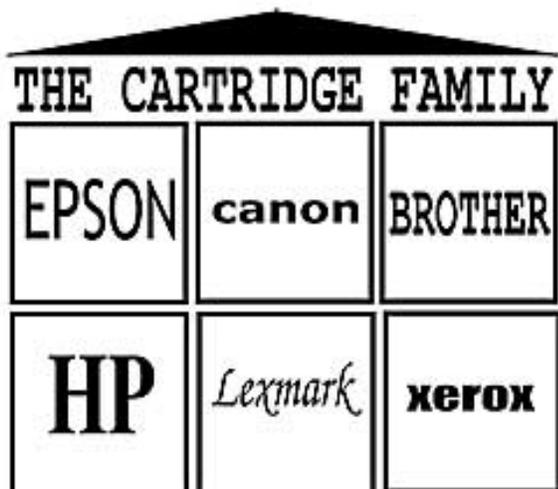
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those two groups, there were fast (ISO 400) Kodak Tri-X films for B&W news (action and nighttime) pictures, as well as slower (ISO 25) Kodachrome film for beautiful, fine-grained slides. If you were happy with black-and-white prints, there was very fine grained Panatomic-X (ISO 32) that could produce great enlargements. There was a film for everything! But what if you had the Panatomic-X in your camera, and six frames hadn't been used yet; and you wanted to shoot a night baseball game under floodlights? You could remove the unfinished film from the camera, or you could bang away at the kids in order to finish the roll. Cheez! What a waste! Plus, you had to obtain a roll of the faster film, too. But with your digital camera, you have all of those "films" in the camera at the same time -- color or B&W-- with a choice of ISO values to be selected as you need them, regardless of the number of shots you've already made. If only they had done this years ago!

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The Cartridge Family

by Grant Fuller,
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We're beat. I hate to admit it. I come from more innocent times when fairness was something to strive for. Family values were not measured by the Sopranos but by families with more law-abiding objectives.

I hate to give up without a fight but I do not hold much hope for us. If you have a printer that func-

tions well by refilling cartridges, keep it. Repair it when it becomes necessary and show it your unconditional love.

The new printers come with chips on the cartridges that the "dealers" say are for telling us when our ink levels get low. Those chips also tell the printer to stop printing after a certain number of nozzle firings or page counts and I strongly suspect that one of my printers is set to refuse a cartridge that was removed and replaced.

I bought some replacement cartridges that were substitutes at a much better price than the gouging name branders, but the trick to beating the dealers required me to remove the chip from the old cartridge and put it on the new one. This is much easier than it sounds, an exacto knife can pop the chip out of its little plastic holder, and it can then be slipped into the ready and waiting slot on the new cartridge.

I replaced the colour cartridges and the printer began flashing lights in the tank bed as each cartridge was replaced. It took me a while to figure out what it was trying to tell me but I should have known right away. I assumed that my chip replacement skills were not up to par or maybe I had been swindled while attempting to swindle the other swindlers. Out of curiosity, I took one of my black cartridges out (this printer has two blacks) and checked it for ink, still lots. I replaced it and the blinking light began on this slot as well. The same thing happened with the other black.

Apparently, there is more going on with this little chip than meets the eye. Well, actually, nothing meets the eye, it's all too small, but this new aggravation raises the stakes. Now the ink re-filling industry has a chip resetter that we can buy which presumably sets the chip to its original state where it says to the printer, "I am brand new and full." I have not tried this but I would like to hear from anyone who has, preferably, if you have had success. If I can find a way to beat these printers I own, I will keep them in good repair. The price of ink for inkjets is beyond outrageous and some people are getting very rich. I can only try to imagine what wonderful gifts we would find under the tree of the Cartridge Family this year.

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Moving on to Vista – Part 3

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Your PC's desktop is the largest, most user defined area on your PC's screen. It contains all your own shortcuts, folder icons and your personal desktop picture. The desktop is really just a personal file folder on drive C. That means that any work you do on the desktop is saved for you on Drive C and not lost when you turn the computer off. Of course any documents, pictures, etc. that are "saved" on your desktop can be moved or copied to other folders on your hard drive.

After a while some of, make that most of us, find our desktop becomes loaded with program icons and shortcut icons. Program shortcut icons are a convenient way to get to programs that you use a lot. Unfortunately, when you install new programs most of them add a desktop shortcut and soon you have a desktop full of shortcuts, making it hard to find a shortcut when you want it. Here are a couple of solutions to this clutter.

The left end of the taskbar contains a "Quick Launch Toolbar+." By default, Windows Vista places one or two program icons here (i.e. Internet Explorer). You can drag a limited number of additional shortcut icons for your favorite programs to this area and save space on your desktop. A "feature" of the Quick Launch Toolbar is that you only have to point at the program icons there and left-click once to start the program. This might seem a little confusing at first if you are used to double clicking on a program icon to start it, but you'll probably get used to it pretty fast.

Program shortcuts on your desktop point to programs that are also listed in your Start menu. The most frequently used programs can be seen when you click on the Start button. On the Start menu, click on "All Programs" to see all the other programs installed on your computer. You may need to use the scroll bar to see all of them and you will probably find more programs than you have shortcuts on your desktop. So, once you confirm that a program shortcut points to a program listed on the Start menu, you can safely delete infrequently used desktop shortcuts.

A third approach to reducing desktop clutter is to consolidate shortcuts. If you have multiple programs that do similar tasks (i.e. A photo catalog and picture manipulation program), create a desktop folder named "Photos". Then drag your shortcuts into the "Photos" folder and you're done.

Vista comes with a new set of desktop pictures. Access to alternative desktop pictures is similar, but slightly different, from what you may be used to with Windows XP. Right-click on a empty area of the desktop and click on "Personalize". On the "Personalization" menu select "Desktop Background". An array of available pictures will appear. Scroll through the pictures, select one. Make a selection from "How should the picture be positioned" and click OK.

That's fine if all you want to use are the pictures that came with Vista. What if you want to use something different? Just follow the steps list above but when you get to the "Desktop Background", instead of selecting one of the available pictures, next to where it says "Picture Location" click once on "Windows wallpapers". You'll see a list of other areas that contain pictures and colors. Want to use a photograph that you saved to your computer instead? Click the browse button. On the left side of the "Browse" screen, click on "Pictures". From the Picture folders on the right side of the Browse screen, make your selection, use the "How should the picture be positioned" if needed, and press the Open button to finish.

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Look Ma No Hands

By Bruce Jacobs,
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I have been using this feature on and off for certain applications for a while and it has its good points and its bad points.

The intent of the software is to allow the user to speak words into the computer and for the computer to recognize those words, understand that some of them are commands, and also understand that some of them are input to programs. In other words, when I say the words "please save me", the

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computer must decide whether to add the words to the document I am editing as if I had typed them, or add the word "please" to the document, and then bring up the save dialog box to save the document with the name "me".

The program that is attempting to do this has two major hurdles to conquer. It has to recognize the spoken words correctly. This is helped by the training exercises. But it has its limitations.

It must also understand "in context" which of those words are commands and which of those words are to be part of my document. As time goes on, you learn to pause before speaking a command. So in the above example of "please save me", I would say the words altogether relatively quickly in order to enter them in my document. If I wanted to add the word "please" to my document then save the document, I would speak the word "please", then pause for a few seconds, then save the word "save." This would bring up the save dialog box and I could continue as if it was a command.

As far as the good points are concerned: If I'm working off printed list or when I know for sure what I want to say clearly, it can be a much faster way of inputting text than for me to type it. Some of that is due to my typing speed being somewhat slow. I am a faster typist than most hunt and peck folks, but I would never be able to keep a job as a secretary. It is also much better at spelling than I am.

If I don't know what I'm going to say in advance the program does not facilitate me speaking what I want to say and then recomposing it later. Some of this may be my fault. I find that I can type up an article by hand and maintain enough control so that in the end I have something coherent. When I just speak out what I want it does not always make sense. I spend way too much time revising it.

One of the disadvantages is that you need to spend a little bit of time training the voice recognition system. The system works best when you are running a very simple application such as WordPad or Notepad. It can even be used to some extent in Microsoft Word. However when using an application such as PowerPoint, the program spends so much time trying to figure out what possible commands you might be wanting to perform and not enough time actually realizing that you are trying to enter words.

Another problem is homonyms. These are words that sound the same but they have different meanings in English except for the possibility of some contextual clues. There is no way for the speech recognition software to know whether I want "2", "two", "to", or "too." During setup the program asks you if they can look at the contents of documents on your hard drive to help you determine what word you used most often and in what context. This does help it guess which homonym you want.

The final problem I wish to discuss is the editing features. Whenever I create a text document I will want to fix mistakes. There are some commands in the software that will help fix mistakes, but they are limited and clumsy. Some of them will even (in theory) help prevent mistakes by the voice recognition software in future. All that being said, I find that editing documents using the voice recognition software is very frustrating. I always resort to using the arrow keys and the mouse to navigate through the document.

Vista speech recognition is a helpful tool when transcribing printed text or when words have been spoken into a tape recorder. However for initial composition of documents or editing I do not find it useful. I do not believe that I could ever learn to use it as a complete 100% substitute for the keyboard and mouse. I would not consider it a replacement if I was disabled.

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Bot-Nets

by Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D.

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Keeping your computer safe while connected to the Internet is becoming more and more difficult. The "attackers" are becoming more sophisticated and are sharing more ways to get their software into your computer. Business Week recently ran an article on the major security problems expected in 2008. Unfortunately, most of them arrived long before the new year started. We have been warned for years that it was possible to recruit unprotected computers into networks that could be controlled by an external source. This recruitment network problem has gotten much worse over the past few years. It is estimated that 7% of the computers con-

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ected to the Internet have been infected with a Botnet program. So what is a "Botnet"?

A robot or "bot" software program allows a computer to be remotely controlled without the knowledge of the computer's owner. When you have a number of "bot" controlled computers it is referred to as a "botnet". All of the computers in the botnet carry out commands issued by the network controller. Just one example of what can be done with a botnet is the sending of spam. The controller can easily have 100,000 computers in its network. So the botmaster will contract to send out one million e-mail messages. The network can then send ten messages from each of the compromised computers. With the constant connection to the Internet using cable or DSL the computer owner will have no idea that his/her computer has been the source for ten spam messages.

Now you might say that the idea that someone can control 100,000 computers in a botnet is ridiculous. However, as of October 2007 a major Internet security service had the IP addresses of over 12 million computers that were infected with bot software. There is also a newer threat called the Storm Worm botnet that has infected millions of computers just this year. In addition to its computer recruiting ability, it has built-in defenses that are preventing security services from analyzing it. In an E-Week article it was noted that "... Storm worm is sending DDoS attacks to not only the researchers looking into it but to anybody on their subnet, within 5 seconds of (their) initiating efforts to fight it or examine it". A DDoS attack is a "distributed denial of service" which can bring down a computer system or network by overwhelming it with messages. A very large volume of messages are sent by the botnet in a very short period of time. It is estimated that the Storm net controls over one million computers. This would make it the most powerful supercomputer in the world, exceeding the computing power of all previous computers.

People frequently wonder why anyone would want to produce viruses, worms and other kinds of Internet attacks. Years ago it was primarily because "they could do it". Today, it has become a real source of financial gain. Let's take a look at one financial resource created by controllers of botnets. On many web pages you find ads of various types that are sponsored by Google. When these ads are clicked, the advertiser pays Google who, in turn,

pays the owner of a web page, usually 80% of the fee. So the botmaster sets up a web page and contracts with Google to display ads. Then, using the botnet, sends commands to the computers in its net to click on the ads. This results in payments to the botmaster. So even with a small botnet of say 5-10,000 computers, the botmaster can easily obtain \$15,000-\$20,000 per month in fraudulent payments. When you consider that the known botnets all have more than 100,000 compromised systems, you get a better idea of the scale of the fraud involved. This type of click fraud has been estimated to make up 5-20% of the payments made by search companies.

Another use of large botnets is extortion. The botmaster can send an e-mail to a corporation warning that a DDoS will take place at a specific time unless a payment is made. As I mentioned earlier, spam e-mail contracts are also a source of revenue for botmasters. As these networks proliferate, the sale of the IP addresses of robotically controlled computers is also favored as an income source.

So far it would appear that the only persons affected by botnets would be corporations. However, if your computer is infected, everything you do can be reported to the botmaster. Bots can incorporate "keylogger" software. That will record keystrokes, especially any related to passwords, user names or other desirable information. Another function of bot software is screen capture. It can record an entire screen and transmit the data to the botmaster. A compromised computer can also be used as a base for finding other unprotected computers to be recruited into the net. Another consideration is that the largest number of computers are those in the hands of private individuals. So you may be a major part of the problem if your computer is infected by a bot.

Once a computer has been compromised, the bot software is usually designed to hide and protect itself. For example it will search for and disable any other malware located on the computer or its associated network. It may also hide itself by means of a rootkit. It may also block updates of any anti-virus or anti-spyware software. It may even fake the process so the user believes that an update has taken place. One of the most common modifications involves changes to the Windows host file or by changing the location of the host file and altering the registry.

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There are also some traps on the Internet that can lead a user to download bot (Trojan) software without realizing it. Phishing e-mail can lead to web pages that have automatic download links for bot software. Web pages can be hijacked and links added to lead the viewer to web sites that contain "free" software links that are actually hidden bot programs. Bot programs are incorporating "social engineering" functions which serve to entice users to unknowingly download malware. People are the weakest link in the security chain. E-mail, web pages, instant messaging, social contact web sites are all used by bot malware as a means of collecting information and linking to compromised computers.

Many times the actions of a computer user are governed by visual clues. An attacker may take advantage of this by providing false visual clues on a web page or a pop-up. If the dialog box or pop-up is intrusive the user may click inappropriately just to get rid of the intruder. This can lead to the download of a bot.

So how do you know if you've been infected? The easiest way to tell is related to how you have been protecting your computer from infection. Do you have all of the following?

- a. hardware firewall.
- b. software firewall that checks both incoming and outgoing messages.
- c. anti-virus software that is updated at least daily.
- d. anti-spyware software that you either run weekly or that runs in RAM constantly.
- e. keep your Windows software patches up to date.

If you don't use any of these safety mechanisms, then your machine is almost 100% guaranteed to be compromised. Even if you have taken all of these precautions, you can still be infected. However, the most effective mechanism for dealing with bots is to prevent their getting into your computer. So you have to keep the software up to date and you have to use it.

Ideally, your firewall hardware/software combination should keep you invisible on the Internet. Bot programs are constantly searching for unprotected computers with open ports. You may not be aware that your computer has over 64,000 port that can be used for communication. The most common usage are the ports in the lower range, under 1,024. How-

ever, some bots use high end ports (>60,000) for transmission of commands. One place you can check your computers port and its invisibility on the Internet is www.GRC.com. The Gibson Research site provides a free port scan and much good information on interpreting the findings as well as how to protect your system.

Ideally the anti-virus and anti-spyware software would be able to find and remove any bot software that made its way onto your computer. However, this software needs to know the "signature" of the malware in order to identify it. So the producers of the malware are always a step ahead of the good guys. The security services have to find and disassemble the new malware before they can devise the protection against it. So it is up to the user to keep the security software as current as possible to reduce the chances of infection. Like it or not, security on the Internet is a never ending battle.

Dr. Lewis is a former university and medical school professor of physiology. He has been working with personal computers for over thirty years, developing software and assembling systems.

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Sort The Start Menu

After a few months of adding new software to WinXP, the All Programs list probably looks like a chaotic mess. Some newly installed programs end up on the bottom of the list, while others seem to slip themselves into the middle.

To sort the list into alphabetical order, simply right-click any of the programs or folders in the All Programs menu and activate the Sort By Name command. This will reorganize the entire All Programs menu.

Make "No" Mean "No" In WinXP

One of our pet peeves about Windows' file management is that it contains a Yes To All button but not a No To All button. The Yes To All button lets you automatically overwrite all file duplicates when you are copying files from one location to the next. A No To All button would be nice so you could automatically prevent any duplicates from being overwritten. If you are copying an entire group of files from one folder to another and many of them are duplicates you do not want to overwrite, the process can be a

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CLUB SUPPORTERS

THE SECRET GUIDE TO COMPUTERS

The Secret Guide is available at every New Orleans Personal Computer Club General Meeting. The latest printing is available for only \$15.00. Or contact Mary Prinz either at: secretary@nopc.org or (504) 455-1412.

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real pain. Fortunately you can work around this limitation. When you copy files from one place to another and Windows prompts you to overwrite the first file, hold down the SHIFT key and click No. From that point on, No To All will be enabled for that particular copy session and no duplicates will be

overwritten.

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The New Orleans Personal Computer Club donated a tree for planting at LaSalle Park in memory of M. Gerry McCann.

February 2008

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					1	2 Ground Hog Day
3	4	5 Mardi Gras Throw Me Some- thing	6 NOPC Gen Mtg J.D. Meisler School 6:30p-8:30p	7	8	9
10	11	12 Genealogy SIG 7:00 pm Call 887.5746 for meeting location	13 NOPC BOD @ TBD 6:30p-8:30p	14 Valentine's Day	15	16
17	18 President's Day	19	20	21 New & Inter- mediate User SIG Old Metairie Library 6:30p-8:30p	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	

The New Orleans Personal Computer Club (NOPCC) is a private non-profit organization chartered under the State of Louisiana. Its purpose is to provide an open forum for discussion and education of the membership in the use and application of PCs, peripheral equipment and software. The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the author (s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the NOPCC, its members or its officers. The club does not verify for accuracy the articles in this newsletter and leaves verification of accuracy to its readers. Articles in this newsletter may be duplicated as long as credit is given to the author (s) and the NOPCC. Annual Dues Schedule: Regular Member, \$40/yr.; Family Membership, \$60/yr.;

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